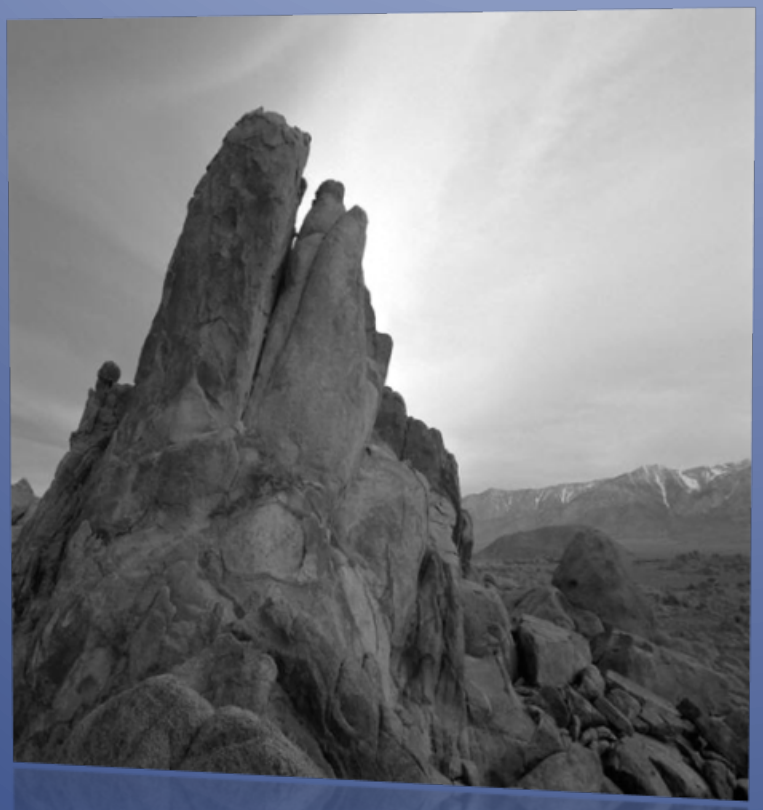

Subject Specialization: A Way Forward

Report prepared by U Windsor Librarians in preparation for the arrival of a new University Librarian, 2015

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> "The Harwood framework begins with conversations that help us listen to our community then act on what we hear. This "public knowledge," enables us to envision a greater sense of possibility as we move forward to align our strategies with the work of our colleagues on campus. Listening to the community roots our work in what matters to people..."[1]

Introduction

Having a well-thought out approach to subject specialization within the University of Windsor library system is an important way to add value to the instituion by ensuring responsive library services that closely align resource allocation with user needs.

The purpose of this document is to explore the key issues that need to be addressed in order to enhance and develop this cornerstone of the 21st century academic library on our campus.

The Issues

1. *Transparent and Responsive Allocation of Budget (including acquisition of electronic resources).*

In order to ensure the responsible and responsive stewardship of limited resources, it will be important for the new University Librarian to be transparent and collaborative in matters respecting the budget, including:

a. Devising and implementing a transparent and evidence-based methodology for allocation of the acquisitions budget to the various subject areas;
b. Organizing effective teams / committees to advise on acquisitions and cancellations, in particular for electronic resources and bulk e-book purchases; *and acting upon and responding to* the advice provided;

[1] Nancy Kranich, et al. "The Promise of Academic Libraries Turning Outward to Transform Campus Communities," (April 2014) 75:4 College and Research Libraries News, 182-186 at 183 . online: http://crln.acrl.org/content/75/4/182.full

c. Devising and implementing fully transparent communications with Department Heads and subject specialists regarding initial budget allocation as well as periodic communications and information sharing to ensure informed management of assigned budget;
d. Reframing the culture of the organization to appreciate the need to appropriately support the needs of campus courses. One important tool for achieving this is by providing subject specialists with sufficient discretion and authority to make purchase decisions to achieve this end;
e. Reframing the culture of the organization to appreciate the need to appropriately support the research needs of faculty. One important tool for achieving this, addition to that noted in (f) above, would be a fund set aside specifically devoted to fulfilling patron purchase requests.

2. Support for Specialization Services

> "the librarians' role as an educational partner is recognized as one area of strategic importance for the long-term vitality of research libraries and the effectivenss of campus teaching and learning initiatives..." [2]

In order to ensure the close alignment of Library services with user needs, it will be important for the new University Librarian to consider improving support for the work of subject specialists, including:

a. Respecting the value added by having information literacy sessions prepared and presented by subject specialists when appropriate;
b. Respecting the value added through the outreach work performed by subject specialists with faculties/departments, faculty members and graduate students, including the need for specialized research appointments and consultations;
c. Building close collaboration with faculties/departments for program development and teaching;
d. Building closer collaborative research relationships with faculties and departments;
e. Ensuring adequate subject specialization support for professional programs;

[2] Elizabeth Dupuis, "Amplifying the Educational Role of Librarians" (Aug 2009) no 265 ARL: Research Library Issues: Special Issue on Liaison Librarian Roles 9 - 14 at 11. Online: http://publications.arl.org/rli265/10

f. Ensuring adequate human resourcing to achieve the outcomes noted above.

> "One area of particular interest was a deeper engagement of library liaisons with Deans, Department Chairs, and key faculty to better understand the department's teaching focus, objectives and challenges, and identify courses in which library support would be most relevant." [3]

3. Coordination of Services

In order to ensure responsive services, the efforts of every department within the library must be directed towards supporting the work of subject specialists in meeting the needs of users. Support services within the institution must be directed towards this shared goal. Coordination of services requires high-level vision for improved services, implemented through institution-wide policy changes, improved communications and appropriate delegation of authority.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the decision to use subject specialization as a key tool towards improving organizational responsiveness and close alignment with user needs, to ensure transparent use of institutional resources is a cultural shift that requires vision and commitment from those in leadership positions within the library.

> "As we move further and further into the age of Google, where faculty and administrators feel that all information is online and easily located, it is increasingly important that liaison librarians use the relationships that they have built to connect the library's work to the academic mission of their university. Building relationships is becoming the essence of what it is to be a liaison librarian..." [4]

[3] *Ibid.* at 11.

[4] Kara Whatley, "New Roles of Liaison Librarians: A Liaison's Perspective" (Aug 2009) no 265, Research Library Issues: Special Issue on Liaison Librarian Roles, 29-32 at 29. Online: http://publications.arl.org/rli265/30